DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 120 866 CS 501 316

AUTHOR Lanigan, Richard L.
TITLE The Speech Discipline in Crisis - - A Cause for Hope.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Illinois Speech and Theatre Association (St. Louis, November 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Communication (Thought Transfer); Educational Objectives; *Educational Philosophy; Educational Problems; Higher Education; Interdisciplinary Approach; *Process Education; *Speech; Theories
IDENTIFIERS *Speech Communication

ABSTRACT

Speech communication is a distinct discipline, but one in a healthy state of conflict between theory and practice. The crisis in the speech discipline (and in academic generally) exists because speech does not present itself as a consumable value; quality program decisions are not made; speech is often conceived as only one subject matter; general motivation is not always provided, that is, academics are seldom part of the real-world speech process; and few academics have a spontaneous answer to the question, "What do you teach?" Speech does not claim to alter the conditions of life, rather, it seeks to enhance the quality of the life we already have. As such, the best argument for the value of the speech discipline states that speech is not a product, but total human communication is a valuable goal; speech is not just one rational process, but the ability to integrate reason, emotion, and expectations; speech is not just the art of speaking well, but also the art of listening; and speech teaches human beings how to effectively cope with each other and their world. (KS)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED120866

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

THE SPEECH DISCIPLINE IN CRISIS -- A CAUSE FOR HOPE*

RICHARD L. LANIGAN, Ph.D.

*This speech was one of three keynote addresses on the topic "Search for Identity: Who are We?" at the Illinois Speech and Theatre Association convention at St. Louis, Missouri on November 8, 1975. The program Chairman was Prof. Paul Hibbs; the other speakers were Dr. Marie Nichols of the University of Illinois and Dr. Halbert Gulley of Northern Illinois University. Dr. Lanigan is Associate Professor of Speech at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois, 62901.

CS 501 3/6

I would like to begin my speech, and I do call it a speech since it reflects my attitude that by my presence here tonight I am practicing the art of speaking and not English composition; as I was saying, I would like to begin my speech by noting that I selected the title THE SPEECH DISCIPLINE IN CRISIS--A CAUSE FOR HOPE as an epigramatic expression of the view I hold about the subject we all teach and study.

My view is quite simple. I believe that Speech is by any contemporary method of definition a distinct discipline, and I shall say why in a moment. Second, I think that our discipline by definition always exists in a situation of crisis, and I think there is good evidence for this position. Finally, I believe that any discipline which accommodates crisis engenders hope, and I mean "hope" in its literal sense as a desire that carries an expectation for the best of results. In my explanation of these three points, I want to suggest my answer to the question posed for tonight, namely, "Who are we?"

Let me expand on my first point which is that speech by any contemporary definition is a distinct discipline. The best contemporary definition for a discipline that I have discovered is the one which Thomas Kuhn offers in his highly influential book, THE STRUCTURE OF SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTIONS. Kuhn argues that the acceptance of a subject matter paradigm, that is, a definitive example of theory and practice, is the event that transforms a random group of persons interested in the study of a particular subject into a profession composed of persons teaching and studying a discipline.

Consensus about what is being studied and how it is taught signal the emergence of a discipline. What is problematic with this definition offered by Kuhn is the nature of "consensus." Is the paradigm for the discipline articulated

in the form of agreement about theory? That is, should we play philosopher and construct one ideal account of speech? Or, is the consensus to be articulated in the form of application. That is, should we construct an ideal account of successful performance? At the pragmatic level, I am voicing an issue that we have professionally, and sometimes unprofessionally, debated for years. And in a concise sense the issue debated is this: Should the speech discipline prepare persons to be critical thinkers (I characterize this as the theory monger approach) or should the discipline prepare persons to be effective and articulate speakers, (I call this the performance monger approach)? In Kuhn's terms the choice, that is the selection of a paradigm, is between the good man thinking straight or the good man speaking well. This issue, as you all know, was first recorded in a polite, but heated conversation between Plato and Gorgias.

Given our respect for our classical beginnings, it has been difficult ever since to come to a resolution of the theory-performance conflict. Consistently, we have assumed along with our Greek mentors that the positions between theory and practice were irreconcilable in any serious, permanent sense. I take as my evidence for this point the example of the basic, first year course in speech, whether in the high school or the college. Some of us have courses built on the paradigm of interpersonal communication. We believe that within the academic pantheon that the "god of theory" has blessed our undertaking. Some of us have courses constructed on the subject matter of public speaking and we believe that the "god of performance" has smiled on our paradigm. Some of us (and here I include my own institution, SIU) believe that god is there but we cannot decide which corner of the church he is in today.

Hence, we have two beginning courses: one in public communication and another in interpersonal communication. This is an admission that we have called in as a consultant the 17th Century French philosopher Blaise Pascal and he has advised us to make a wager on the existence of god, thus no matter which course the student may choose, they are still in church.

In the end, however, we all recognize that even such a wager does not solve our problem. We are still faced with the same question: Do we have a paradigm for our discipline or do we have two equally good paradigms in theory and performance, between which we can never finally choose? As I noted previously, our forebearers could not decide, nor can we if the basic course is typical evidence. In short, neither our history nor our contemporary practices offer much enlightenment. Indeed, the very name of our national, professional organization the SPEECH COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION records this ambiguity of choice between theory and performance. Is the name "Speech Communication Association" a triple redundancy of terms or clarity thrice presented? I think most of us here take the name "speech communication" to be the paradigm label of the discipline which is a marriage of convenience between the theory mongers and the performance mongers.

This marriage of convenience, this acceptance of the concept of "speech communication" is for me a telltale sign of crisis in the speech discipline, which is the second issue that I want to address tonight. Kuhn has argued that whenever there are competing paradigms or when theory and practice can be interpreted in more than one way, then, a discipline is in crisis. There is no longer a state of professional consensus about what is being studied

and taught.

I suggested earlier that our discipline of speech has always been in crisis, that theory and performance have always been conflicting paradigms. To me this suggests that in the long run, the symptoms of conflict are a mark of health, not illness. Whenever there is a basic want for change and growth, then there is hope for improvement and renewed appreciation. We have too long confused problem-solving with problem-stating. In a discipline like speech it is equally, perhaps more, important to focus on the nature of problems than on the functional solutions to be had.

I think it is essential at this point for us to look more closely at the concept of crisis. On reflection, it seems to me that the theory-performance crisis in the speech discipline is not so simple as I have been suggesting. In particular, it seems important that we look carefully at the context of our theory-performance conflict to see if the crisis is exclusive to speech or if it pervades academia and society at large. It may appear a moot question to ask if academia and American society are presently in a state of crisis. Yet, we have all long since learned that appearances can be deceptive, that the argument from sign is not always a deduction. This point is brilliantly thematized in the latest issue of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR where Paul Freund recounts in his article "The Great Disorder of Speech" that the legal right to free speech (a statement of theory and social appearance) depends for its existence on use (an exercise of performance and social reality).

In similar fashion, the contemporary German communication theorist and

philosopher, Jürgen Habermas contends that crisis is prerequisite to a coherent understanding of, and competency in, communication. He says that there are four states of crisis that resolve the conflict between theory and practice by stimulating consensus about a discipline.

First, there is economic crisis. The economic system, in our case the speech discipline, does not produce the requisite quantity of consumable values. The latest issue of THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION contains an article by Steven Marcus entitled "The Demoralized Humanities" which describes this economic crisis in academia. He says: "The university and higher education as a whole have become auxiliary institutions of production. However, the humanities normally do not produce exchange values or commodities; nor do they train human beings to produce them in turn."

Second, there is a rationality crisis. The administrative system, again our case the speech discipline, does not produce the requisite quantity of rational decisions. I do not think this point needs formal illustration. If you are a principal or department head, just think of the last dispute you had with a teacher; if you are a teacher just recall the last conversation you had with your administrator. In either case, I think you have an example of the rationality crisis.

Third, there is the legimitation crisis. The legimitation system, which for us is the speech discipline, does not provide the requisite quantity of generalized motivations. For example, Gerald Else writing on the "Future of the Humanities" in the Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences declares: "In the modern American educational system, training in reasoning

and persuasion, if offered at all, is given the marginal and partial form of high school debate--and exercise which I believe is on the decline nowadays and which in any case never enlisted more than a small fraction of the student body. One might maintain perhaps that some of this function is now served by the new-style high school science courses. If so this would be a case of science performing a humanistic function. It may be that the need for reasoned persuasion, which bulked so large in the ancient democracies and in the beginning of our own national life, has now lapsed or is served by the professionals of Madison Avenue. In any case, I see no evidence of public awareness that it has anything to do with the humanities."

Finally, there is the motivation crisis. The socio-cultural system does not generate the requisite quantity of action-motivating meaning. To quote Gerald Else again: "The old humanistic training in logic and argument was not given in a vacuum and was not literary in the usual sense of that word. It was embodied in the literary texts, but the center of gravity was not in literature, belles lettres as such, but in moral-political issues. The target was not l'homme moyen sensuel, but homo politicus, and the central authors were not, for example, Propertius and Ovid, but Cicero and Virgil (the Virgil of the Aeneid), because they provided the best definition of the duties of man in society, man responsible for his society, man guiding the destinies of his society. In Northern Europe especially, and our Anglo-Saxon corner of it, it is notable how the center tended to be occupied not by poets but by orators, political philosophers, and historians."

Let me summarize my analysis of crisis this way. Neither society, academia, nor the speech discipline are in crisis for the seemingly apparent and usually

discussed reasons. The crisis is NOT the social tendency to exhault technology. The crisis is NOT the division of the social sciences into highly specialized disciplines. The crisis is NOT the result of the use of quantification, objectification, and formalization in the methodological design of the special sciences, as though there were something inherently wrong with counting. Rather, there is a crisis in society, academica, and the speech discipline because (1) we do not have a consumable value, speech is not a product, (2) we do not always have quality program decisions, speech is often conceived as only one subject matter, (3) we do not always provide general motivation, we are seldom seen and heard to practice our own art of speaking, that is, we are seldom part of the speech process, and (4) we do not generate action-motivating meaning, for example, few of us have a coherent and spontaneous answer to the question, "What do you teach?"

In the end we are left with one manifest conclusion according to Graham Hough, a Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, namely that "the humanities (and we might add the speech discipline) don't claim to alter the conditions of life: they claim to enhance the quality of life we already have" and the "crisis is that we as beginning to doubt whether the claim is true." The obvious question emerges--Is there hope? Can or should the crisis in the speech discipline be overcome? Need we bother to answer the question: Who are we?

I began my speech by suggesting that any discipline which accommodates crisis engenders hope. I believe speech to be such a discipline. But in stating this attitude I have a special definition of "speech" in mind. For me speech is a discipline in the humanities and should be understood to mean

"human communication." It is not "interpersonal communication," nor "public speaking," nor "theatre," nor any of the other special subcategories we prize so highly. Speech is not just a process, nor just an event. We have too long sought to locate our hopes for the discipline in speech as either a means or an end. We have wrongly thought that we had to choose between critical thinking and articulate expression for a paradigm. Our logic of disjunction has tended to make us forget the unity of our discipline. We have forgotten that the key to the humanities is the use of language and that the appropriate name for this subject is "speech." Equally important, we have failed to perceive that the history of our discipline has too often been an attempt to specify the function of speech, rather than the nature of man as an expressive being. While we have debated that function is a choice between theory (or critical thinking) and performance (or articulate expression), we have neglected the nature of man, the nature of self development, the emergence of personality. The nature of speech is the expression of our common humanity, the nature of speech is the expression of all those values and attitudes that we call human and whose loss we deplore as inhumane.

While we can teach students to use speech to "alter the conditions of life" we must simultaneously teach them to "enhance the quality of life" in themselves and others. We as teachers should in turn overcome our inferiority complex in the academic world and display our best hopes by saying with self assurance: (1) Speech is not a product, but human communication is the tangible of goal of self understanding in a realistic world, (2) Speech is not just one rational process, but human communication is the ability to integrate appropriately my reason, my emotion, and my expectations, (3) Speech is not just the art of speaking well, human communication is the art of speaking and listening,

(4) Speech is not a discipline that answers the question "What do you teach?" with either silence or deliberate jargon, but answers instead: "I teach persons, human beings, how to communicate, how to effectively cope with themselves, and their world."

I conclusion, let me suggest that Speech is a discipline, but one in a healthy state of crisis. It is therefore a discipline that offers hope by emerging continually from an identity crisis as the human endeavor in society, academia, and the humanities. Only by seeing "speech" as "human communication" do we focus on the human nature and human function that is given in the conjunction of communication theory and performance as a human science. As the French philosopher and psychologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty says: "Speech is an instrument for the conquest of self by contact with other people."

So, Who are we? We are human communicators.

SOURCES

Gerald F. Else, "The Old and the New Humanities," Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences 98, no. 3 (Summer, 1969): 803-808.

Paul A. Freund, "The Great Disorder of Speech," The American Scholar 44, no. 4 (Autumn, 1975): 541-559.

Jürgen Habermas, Knowledge and Human Interest, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971). Chapter 7: "Dilthey's Theory of Understanding Expression: Ego Identity and Linguistic Communication."

Jürgen Habermas, Legitimation Crisis, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975). Part 2: "Crisis Tendencies in Advanced Capitalism

Jürgen Habermas, Theory and Practice, trans. John Viertel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973.

Jürgen Habermas, Towards a Rational Society, trans, Jeremy J. Shapiro (London: Heinemann, 1971). Chapter 5: "The Scientization of Politics and Public Opinion."

Graham Hough, "Crisis in Literary Education" in Crisis in the Humanities, ed. J. H. Plumb (London: Penguin Books, 1964), pp. 96-109.

Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 2nd. ed. enlarged (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

Richard L. Lanigan, Speaking and Semiology (The Hague and Paris: Mouton & Co., 1972).

_____, Speech Act Phenomenology (The Hague: Martinas Nijhoff, 1976).

Steven Marcus, "The Demoralized Humanists," The Chronicle of Higher Education 11, no. 7 (October 28, 1975): 24.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language, trans. Hugh J. Silverman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).